
INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS

BEFORE THE

YOUNG MEN'S ASSOCIATION

FOR MUTUAL IMPROVEMENT IN THE CITY OF ALBANY,

DELIVERED NOV. 30, 1841,

BY REV. E. D. ALLEN.

AN

INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS

TO THE

COURSE OF LECTURES,

BEFORE THE

YOUNG MEN'S ASSOCIATION FOR MUTUAL IMPROVEMENT
IN THE CITY OF ALBANY.

DELIVERED NOV, 30 1841.

drafted by
BY REV. E. D. ALLEN.
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Albany, December 2, 1841.

REV. E. D. ALLEN,

SIR,

In behalf of the Young Men's Association, the Executive Committee tender you their thanks for the Introductory Lecture delivered by you before the Association on the 30th ultimo, and solicit a copy for publication. Be assured, sir, that this request is not merely made as a formal compliment, and that when we say it springs unanimously from the audience that listened to you on that occasion, we utter it in no spirit of flattery, but as a prominent reason that impels us to make the application. By giving publicity to the Lecture, we would also gladly extend to others the privilege of sharing in the pleasure and instruction that your kindness imparted to us.

Respectfully, Yours.

C. T. SMYTH,
A. M'CLURE,
GEORGE C. TREADWELL,
S. H. H. PARSONS,
WILLIAM NESSLE,
CHAS. H. STANTON,
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THOMAS R. COURTNEY,
RUFUS H. M'KAY.

Albany, December 7, 1841.

GENTLEMEN :

Your kind note, in relation to my Introductory Lecture before the Association, on the 30th ultimo, has been received. If the publication of the hurried production of a few hours, in the midst of pressing professional engagements, can be of any service to the cause of TRUTH, or afford any gratification to those for whom it was specially intended, I cheerfully commit it to your disposal.

Yours, truly,

E. D. ALLEN.

MESSRS. C. T. SMYTH,
A. M'CLURE,
GEORGE C. TREADWELL, AND OTHERS,

*Executive Committee of
Young Men's Association.*

In exchange
Peabody Institute
Baltimore

AUG 2 1928

LECTURE.

GENTLEMEN :

Invited by your partiality, to deliver a lecture this evening, introductory to the course which you expect to have during the ensuing season, I complied with your request, not without a deep sense of the responsibility it would impose upon me. Though fully aware that the interests of your association might have been more effectually advanced by the efforts of some one having more experience in such matters than myself, yet I found it not in my heart to decline an invitation so kindly proffered : and I can now only say, “such as I have, give I unto you ;” hoping that the same partiality which selected me for this work, will be extended to an *honest*, though it should prove an humble effort to perform it.

I have wholly mistaken the nature and objects of your organization, and the character of those who compose it, if the grand end in view be not intellectual and moral improvement—the cultivation of the mind and heart—that discipline of natural powers which prepares for the greatest usefulness, and consequently the highest enjoyment, in any and every sphere in which Providence may have placed you.

The mind, like the body, requires food for its

support. Neither, without proper nutriment, can be either healthy or vigorous. The aliment adapted to strengthen *mind* is *Truth*—truth, made the subject of careful study, and labored thought. But *what is truth?* This, young gentlemen, is a question of vast moment! as difficult as it is important to be answered; for if there be an equivocal word in the English language, as applied either to human sciences or religion, it is this word *truth!*

It is not my object to enter upon a metaphysical discussion of the different ideas attached to this term by philosophers and metaphysicians who have examined it. Were I fully competent to the task, such a discussion, however ably conducted, would be at least of very doubtful utility; while it would be far, *very far*, from contributing to satisfy the desire in my own bosom which has prompted this effort. The inquiry “what is truth?” was suggested to the human mind ages since; and has returned upon it, as each succeeding generation has arisen and departed. Pagan philosophers have professed to search after truth; and while some of them supposed they had found it, others contended that it could never be found; that all was uncertain, and that finite minds could be sure of no one thing, except that they were sure of *nothing*. Such was the philosophy of even Socrates! Nor have modern times witnessed a very different result, from such abstract, metaphysical discussions. Locke defines truth to be—a right “joining or separating of signs,” *i. e.* ideas or words. “Truth,” he ob-

serves, "seems to me, in the proper import of the word, to signify nothing but the joining or separating of signs, as the things signified by them do agree or disagree one with another." "The joining or separating of signs, here meant, is what we call by another name—*propositions*. So truth belongs only to propositions." This last remark, that "truth belongs only to propositions," discovers the imperfection of his definition. *To utter truth*, would be indeed to utter, or articulate, such signs as really agreed with the ideas they represented. But this, in strictness of language, is not *truth itself*. If by truth, we mean the agreement of an object with our idea of it, then *truth* is one of those abstract terms which can never be precisely defined, without mentioning the object to which it is attributed, or of which it is affirmed. I do not affirm that we should regard truth as subsisting in a subject, independently of the reflections of an intelligence that considers it. Yet there may be truth in every object which subsists, whether we attend to it or not. Thus, there is truth in every art and science. *That truth may be*, nay, *is* undiscovered by the great mass of unthinking mind. Still it exists! And it exists in relation to each particular art or science, as it does not in relation to any other. Hence the proper, and the only proper and useful inquiry is, what is truth in relation to *this*, and *that*, and the *other* subject? The answer must be controlled entirely by the nature of the object or theme proposed. Truth, in mathematics is one thing—in mental and

moral philosophy, another—in natural science, another. To seek for and acquire truth, therefore, we must do something more than agitate the general and abstract question, “What is truth?” We may do this forever, and derive no single advantage from it, until we apply the inquiry to definite subjects, and investigate *truth* under definite aspects and relations. All other efforts will be but a waste of time and energies. Let us refuse to start out in the investigation of truth, until we can determine what truth *is*, in the *abstract*, and we might as well at once commit ourselves to the gloom and solitude of a dungeon, to pine away and die under the influence of disappointed hope, and mad but unsatisfied ambition. We should be like the blind man, from whose eyes the cataract had been removed, who should nevertheless refuse to open his eyes and see, because he had not yet determined the nature of light, or learned to discriminate colors. Or like the mariner, who should refuse to spread his sails to a favorable breeze, which might waft him to his destined haven, because he had not yet settled the philosophy of winds and storms, or satisfactorily accounted for all the phenomena on these subjects, heretofore unexplained.

But you have been more wise than this. Your society for disputation with each other; your library; your reading apartments; this course of lectures—all—all tell of a different sentiment, as the one which prevails in your bosom. You have resolved to keep your eye and your ear, your mind and your

heart, open to the reception of *truth*, on any and every subject. Noble resolution! Object worthy of pursuit! We cannot but admire and applaud the course you have taken. Nay more, we would not stand as idle spectators, simply to approbate and admire. We would join you in your efforts, and seek by our united energies to attain an object so noble, so good.

Permit me then, young gentlemen, while occupying the position with which you have honored me, to direct your attention to *the advantages of truth, and the mode of attaining them*.

By the advantages of truth, I mean not only those benefits which will flow to us, personally, from the actual possession or knowledge of truth; but also, all those advantages which will accrue, both to ourselves, and through our influence to others, from the attainment of that spirit which will most thoroughly fit us for the pursuit or investigation of truth.

The *first* advantage I name is, that when we acquire *truth*, we acquire something which is *permanently our own*. Selfishness is a prominent, I may safely say, the *most* prominent feature of human character. Man is an *acquiring* being. Such is his constitution, that nature prompts him continually to cry "Give! give!" but never urges him to say "it is enough." Even childhood and youth manifest this spirit; and of universal man, it is true, in relation to this passion. As has been well observed of another, "It grows with his growth, and strengthens with his strength." It becomes the

master passion, and makes every thing else minister to its gratification. Hence man is continually reaching after something which he does not possess. Gain is the goal for which he runs—the prize after which he aims. Would that the records of by-gone ages were not so full of the annals of disappointed hope! But in the light of a *rational*, not to say *Christian* philosophy, how unwise and inconsistent are the pursuits and aims of man. He grasps at the *unsubstantial*, while the *real* and *permanent* are overlooked. Physical substances, in their nature perishable; animal enjoyments, necessarily restricted to the existence of the body, constitute the main objects of his desire: while thought, ennobling *thought*, imperishable as the mind itself which originated it, is accounted of little value. It has been a favorite theory with some philosophers, that ideas once acquired, are always retained. In their view, the memory is a tablet or scroll, upon which every idea as it enters the mind, is impressed. These impressions are indelible; and though we may not at any moment recall them, they are deposited in the mind as an imperishable treasure; and we need only to be led back, by the law of association, to the spot where they are recorded, to behold them in all their original vividness and strength. If this theory be true, no single truth acquired by the mind, is ever lost. It incorporates itself with the mental constitution. Thus, while the body and its productions are alike perishable, and continually tending to decay; the mind and its offspring thought, are

alike immortal! spiritual essences, over which the laws of matter exercise no control.

“ The beings of the mind are not of clay!
Essentially *immortal*, they create
And multiply in us a brighter ray,
And more beloved existence!”

Yes! the elements may combine to wrest from us other possessions we have accumulated; but the treasures of *thought* they cannot reach or destroy. Enemies may assail us without, but in the might of their power, they cannot storm and take the castle of truth within. The thief may “break through and steal;” but the storehouse of the *mind* is surrounded by walls which cannot be scaled, and protected by bars which cannot be broken. The honest fruits of our industry may be sacrificed to make up deficiencies caused by the dishonesty and bankruptcy of another; but the results of mental labor are sacredly and inalienably our own. No profane or rapacious hand *can* wrest them from us. The immortal spirit, in which they are enshrined, must itself perish ere they cease to be ours.

Another advantage I name is, *Truth* will open to the mind a rich and continual source of enjoyment. There *is* such a thing, though few know it by experience, as *intellectual* pleasure—enjoyment derived from study; when that study is constantly bringing to the mind new, varied, interesting thought. I am aware that a taste for such pursuits is acquired only by the long continued habit of mental discipline. But that habit once formed and

the soul need not go out of itself to borrow enjoyment. Within there is an unwasting fountain, whose streams are ever gushing forth to assuage its thirst. While uttering this sentiment I may appear to some as a barbarian, speaking in an unknown tongue. They sit down to read, and one half hour closes the exercise with weariness. They pause amid business pursuits to meditate, but the work is tiresome and they soon abandon it. They listen to an essay or lecture ; and their eyelids, as if pressed with a leaden weight, are soon closed, and Morpheus sits smiling upon them. Any thing like mental exercise soon fatigues them. They can find enjoyment any where else sooner than in the high walks of intellectual pursuit. To study, think, reason, reflect and learn, are miserable employments ; and he who pursues them, though his soul is sometimes in an ecstasy, while his knowledge rises, and his joy extends, is judged a man of melancholy ; an object well deserving pity. Such is the world's opinion. The mass believe and practice so.

But amid this mass of opposing testimony, with the general conduct of mankind (all in the pursuit of happiness) constantly giving the lie to the assertion, do you ask for proof that there is such a thing as intellectual enjoyment ; and that *that* enjoyment rises higher and higher in proportion, to the discovery and embrace of truth ? Contemplate with me the history of the noble few in every age, who have dared *to think* ; and the acme of whose am-

bition was *to know truth*. What biography more interesting than that which contains the record of their lives? Who more happy than they? They seem almost to have lived in another world from that in which the multitude around them “lived and moved and had their being;” to have breathed in a purer atmosphere; and to have held intercourse with beings of a higher order. Their intellectual pursuits were their food, their pastime, their rest, their all. New truth discovered, filled them with rapturous emotions. Witness an illustration; marked indeed, but not in all respects without a parallel—in the case of Archimedes the celebrated mathematician of Syracuse. What was it that influenced him to leap with joy from the bath in which a hint of discovery broke upon him, and to run naked into the streets crying, “I’ve found it! I’ve found it?” It was truth; long sought for, and at last obtained! Alas! he fell a martyr to his love of truth. When Marcellus besieged and took the city in which he dwelt, this lover of science was in his museum, with his mind and eyes so fixed upon certain geometrical figures, that he heard not the noise and hurry of the Romans; and perceived not that the city was in their power. In this depth of contemplation and study, a soldier suddenly approached and bade him follow to Marcellus. Refusing to obey until he had solved his problem, the maddened soldier drew his sword and pierced him to the heart. Thus death alone was able to tear him from his loved employment. Were Kepler, and

Bacon, and Newton, and Locke, and a host of like spirits, misanthropes ; plodding their solitary way through earth, saddened and joyless ? Nay, rather, while ignorance and darkness enshrouded those around them, did not the lamp of science shine on their pathway, and the star of hope gleam in their horizon ? They had joys, but they were chastened ; they were refined ; they were elevated ; while the so called pleasures which the vulgar love, were as the dirt beneath their feet. Joy, worthy an immortal being, was theirs. Joy, springing from the discovery and possession of *truth*. How sublime the contrast between men panting after such happiness, and those thirsting only after sensual pleasures ! The one fulfill, in some measure, the end of their existence ; the other thwart and defeat it. God designed that man should think and feel, reason and decide ; then act, deliberately ; and from consistent, virtuous action, find enjoyment. To cultivated and well regulated minds, this is the only true source of happiness. In fact, it is so in the end, to all minds. Pleasures of a lower order, may interest and delight for a season, but “sober second thought” dissipates the illusion. A momentary sensual gratification ended, and there is an aching void within. The wretched solitude of many a votary of pleasure attests the truth of this position. Take one example only—England’s most gifted but ill-fated child of song. Like other men, less gifted, he sought for pleasure from earth’s polluted fountains ; and having tried in turn, intellectual and

sensual enjoyment, he is a competent witness to the power of each to satisfy the soul. Listen to his own confession :

“ What, from this barren being, do we reap?
Our senses narrow, and our reason, frail;
Life, short, and truth a gem which loves the deep;
And all things weighed in custom’s falsest scale—
Opinion and Omnipotence—whose veil
Mantles the earth with darkness; until right
And wrong are accidents; and men grow pale,
Lest their own judgments should become too bright;
And their free thoughts be crimes, and earth have too much
light.

Yet, let us ponder boldly! ’tis a base
Abandonment of reason, to resign
Our right of thought—our last and only place
Of refuge; this, at least, shall still be mine,
Though from our birth the faculty divine
Is chained and tortured: cabined, cribbed, confined,
And bred in darkness; lest the truth should shine
Too brightly on the unprepared mind.”

Though in an evil hour he gave way to the exercise of the basest passions, and in them sought enjoyment; yet sense did not always prevail over reason; and when it did not, the clear verdict of his judgment was, that mind could be happy, only while it lived on food adapted to the mind.

But there is another aspect of this subject, to which I would direct your attention for a moment. Truth, we have said, opens to the mind a rich and continual source of enjoyment. In the discovery and possession of truth, we not only find enjoyment of a high order, but that enjoyment is prolonged—the fountain whence it issues is exhaustless. Not so the pleasures which spring from the embrace of error, or from living in the world of fiction. The

maniac has his pleasure; but it is such as we would not envy. His splendid crown, his golden sceptre, his extended empire, returning reason sweeps away in an hour. The debauched drunkard has his pleasure. At night, his wealth can be estimated only by millions; in the morning, he is poor and wretched, loathed alike in his own eyes and in the eyes of others. The licentious profligate has his pleasure, if worthy the name; but it can be enjoyed only at the sacrifice of all moral principle, when every virtuous emotion has fled from the soul, and all that is amiable and lovely in natural character has departed. Then it is short lived, and the miserable body, stricken by disease and premature death, once in the grave, enjoyment is ended, and the maddened soul raves in despair through eternity. The theatre may present its evening's attraction. An hour may be spent, as in the dreary visions of the night, which the morning dissipates. The mock tragedy or playful comedy may thrill for a moment, and occupy the tense passions of the soul; but the curtain drops, the illusion vanishes, reality returns, and the enjoyment is gone. The adventures of romance captivate the imagination, and hold the mind as it were entranced for a season; but the plot is discovered, the mystery revealed, and the rest is insipid and tasteless. So with error in all its forms.

“It lures but to deceive; it flatters but to destroy.”

Touched by the shaft of truth, it is seen to be powerless, and shrinks away from the light to its loved home, darkness; to its proper insignificance and

nothingness. Not so with truth! The more it is tested the brighter it shines; and the brighter it shines, the more it reflects light and peace and hope and joy, upon the soul of him who loves it. The falling apple, as it revealed to the mind of Newton the principle of gravitation, was no doubt the occasion of transporting joy. But who can tell how much higher and purer that joy became, when it was found true, that the same principle pertained to all bodies; and by it the motion of the worlds above us, as well as many things hitherto deemed mysterious and inexplicable in relation to our own world, could be explained? Each successive new application of the theory thrilled the mind of the discoverer with new joy, and became a theme on which he could dwell with increasing delight.

We admit that truth may sometimes be prostrate in the streets. Error may be seen to prevail. The theory founded in fact may be bitterly opposed by those who might have been expected to be its warmest advocates, and its author hotly persecuted by those he had hoped to find his most tried friends. Truth may be wounded; and for the want of able champions to defend her, left bleeding, and supposed to be half dead. But she can never, never die! The breath of a succeeding generation will reanimate and revive her. Immortality is her inborn right—her God-imparted attribute. The reign of her adversaries is short. For

“ Truth, crush’d to earth, will rise again;
The eternal years of God are hers!
But error, wounded, writhes in pain,
And dies amid her worshippers.”

Who then would not love to pursue and arrive at truth? Who would not improve every facility afforded him to become *eminent* in this work? Young men, seize! yea, seize eagerly the opportunities of improvement, which this Association affords you! Through every medium here presented, seek truth; and if you search for her as for hid treasure, you shall find her.

I name another advantage. Truth will fit you to discharge with profit to yourselves, and usefulness to others, the duties growing out of your relations in life. We live in a world of realities. The conduct of some would seem to indicate that such is not the fact. They live, or at least wish to live, for the most part, in an ideal world. They may, with the followers of Berkeley, theorise and speculate and *abstractionize*, until, in the retirement of the chamber, they persuade themselves that matter does not exist, and there is no external world around them. They may believe that the very paper on which they write, the pen which they handle, nay the very hand which holds it, and moves in obedience to their mental dictates, exist only in idea. But when they mingle in society, they must move and act like other men. They must regard the bodies and property of those around them as actual existences, or they will soon be put in a way to discover their mistake. Of what avail, then, are their fancied schemes, their pleasing errors? They unfit for actual life; while truth alone can prepare for its realities. And here I cannot but advert, for a moment,

to the influence upon character and usefulness, of a taste for fictitious reading, and theatrical amusements. Of the latter it has been said

“ It is a golden but a fatal circle,
Upon whose magic skirts a thousand devils,
In chrysal forms, sit, tempting innocence!
And beckon early virtue from its centre.”

The influence of the former, I deem scarcely less injurious. They are twin sisters. They aid and countenance each other. They feed the same desire. The votaries of each live in the same moral atmosphere; and that atmosphere is any thing but conducive to the strength and proper developement of the mental or moral powers. They destroy capacity alike for self improvement, and usefulness to others. These hotbed plants—summer house flowers; creatures of an ideal world, brought out into the wintry blasts of life's adversities, and the stormy conflict of life's trials, cannot endure them; and soon fade, and wither, and droop, and die. They produce effeminate characters, which may do for the too often sickening, disgusting chat of the so called fashionable parlor; but will never hold their place in the circle of educated minds; nay, among the unsophisticated, common sense, thinking portion of any community. While those who are followers of truth; whose minds and hearts have been measurably trained under its influence; will occupy any post in society, which Providence may assign them, with honor and usefulness. In the political world; in mercantile life; in mechanical employments—

wherever you find them, you will find them honest, generous, dignified, happy. Truth loved, and the disposition most fitted to attain it, form such characters.

Might I add another advantage, it would be *this* : The spirit which prompts to the investigation, and prepares for the reception of truth—truth on any subject—truth in natural, mental, or moral science—truth pertaining to earth and heaven—to this life and the next—to man's relations to his fellow creatures around him, and to his Creator above him; would tend to relieve death of its horror, by removing present doubts and fears and darkness, in regard to future existence ; and preparing its possessor for hallowed communion and fellowship with the Infinite mind—the Fountain of eternal Truth.

But I must hasten to point out the road which leads to truth ; or, to suggest some hints in regard to the best method of pursuing it, and cultivating that disposition which is most favorable to its discovery.

The advantages of which we have spoken cannot be realized without sacrifice and toil. They come not unbidden ; nor will they come at a nod. Like almost every other good, they are attained only by effort, and that effort must be put forth in a certain direction, and controlled by specific influences. 'Tis not all action that terminates in beneficial results ; but such, and such only, as corresponds with the laws prescribed for the attainment of the object desired. If these laws be violated, however great the

wish or the effort to secure any given end, they fail of accomplishing it. In the beautiful language of Cowper,

“ Man on the dubious waves of error tossed,
His ship half foundered, and his compass lost,
Sees, far as human optics may command;
A sleeping fog, and fancies it dry land;
Spreads all his canvas, every sinew plies,
Pants for it—aims at it—enters it, and dies!
Then farewell, all self satisfying schemes—
His well built systems—philosophic dreams—
Deceitful views of future bliss—farewell!
Hard lot of man! to toil for the reward
Of virtue, and yet lose it! Wherefore hard?
He that would win the race, must guide the horse;
Else, though unequalled, to the goal he flies,
A meaner than himself shall gain the prize.”

The first suggestion I would make in regard to the mode in which we are to excel in the pursuit of truth, and which naturally flows out of our previous remarks, is, endeavor to have your mind constantly impressed with its importance. I mean, the importance of gaining truth rather than error, in relation to any particular subject.

There are those who advocate the theory, that it is wholly immaterial *what* a man believes, if he is only sincere in his belief. This theory prepares the mind for the reception of error, as readily as truth. The question to be raised is not, do I possess *truth* in relation to this subject? do the views I entertain correspond with the facts in the case? but simply, am I sincere in my belief? In the study of astronomy, it is not at all important to inquire, whether the earth is a sphere, revolving on its own axis,

and around the sun, thus producing the alternation of day and night, and the changes of the seasons—but simply, am I honest in believing the earth to be flat and motionless, and that the heavenly bodies revolve around it, as a common centre? This is no caricature of the tendency of this theory. It is a fair and legitimate application of the doctrine. On this principle, the followers of Berkeley denied the existence of the material world, and persisted in that denial. As they found themselves obliged to open the doors of their study when they would go out; and to avoid the posts, and the bodies of their fellow men, as they passed through the streets, the fact would strike their mind, as with an electric force—*matter has a real existence! there is an external world!* But the question was not, what is fact, or truth? but, am I sincere in the belief into which I have reasoned myself, in my study? if so, facts, though they are stubborn things, cannot in the least change my opinion.

Simple belief, young gentlemen, will never change the nature of objects, or their relations. There is such a thing as truth! It will remain unchanged and changeless, however human opinion may fluctuate concerning it. Be it your object, then, in the full and influential belief of this statement, evermore to inquire, “What is truth?” Press the question in relation to this lecture, and every one that shall follow, “What is truth?” Press it in relation to every statement that meets your eye, or thrills on your ear, “What is truth?” “what is truth?”

Nearly allied to this, and of equal importance, is another direction. Keep your mind in an inquiring, unprejudiced state, ever open to conviction. Of the importance of this suggestion, I am most deeply sensible; but how to enforce it in proportion to my sense of its importance, I know not. Of particular prejudices, unfavorable to the reception of truth, time would fail me to speak. I must content myself with some general remarks on this topic.

The literal meaning of the term *prejudice*, you are aware, is prejudgment—an opinion or decision of mind, formed without due examination of the facts or arguments which are necessary to a just and impartial determination. Thus, we speak of the mind of a judge or jury being prejudiced, when, before the testimony has been adduced, they say they are prepared to give a decision in the case. Hence the right to challenge a juror, on the ground that having prejudged the case, he is unqualified to give an impartial judgment, when the merits of the cause are spread out before him. Prejudice is one of the most mighty barriers to the progress of truth. Its direct and proper influence on the mind is to fetter the judgment, to narrow down the comprehensiveness of view; in a word, to belittle every faculty of the immortal soul. A man of prejudice lives in a little world by himself; a world so small, that but few others can live there with him; so contracted that it will not admit of the carrying out of large views, of liberal plans, and noble efforts. Not being permitted to soar above or beyond the

contracted boundaries of his own horizon, he will admit nothing to be true, which has not come within the sphere of his own observation or experience. Like the king of Siam, he cannot believe that ice can be formed of sufficient thickness to constitute a bridge, over which loaded wagons can pass, because *he* has never seen it. Reasoning on philosophical or chemical principles, or on any principles, cannot be admitted. All effort to convince is of no avail. The decree has gone forth, which, like the laws of the Medes and Persians, cannot be revoked. *It is not so*—it *cannot* be so—because I have never seen or heard it so. I need not remark, that, this spirit becoming universally prevalent, a total eclipse would come over the arts and sciences; there would be an end to invention and discovery—to the progress of knowledge of every kind; nor need I say, that had this spirit prevailed in all past ages, the light we enjoy had been as darkness; these privileges now richly conferred upon us, had never been our inheritance. Behold a living example of this truth in the present condition of the Celestial Empire! What has China, with her three hundred millions of minds, achieved in the world of letters, of arts and civilization? What discoveries or inventions find their authors among her teeming population? What rays of light, what streams of influence have emanated from her, to bless other lands—to irradiate a darkened world? Nay, what systems of improvement have been devised and put in operation, to elevate and happyfy and save her own population? Truly,

the pall of midnight has been thrown over her, and the wretchedness and ignorance and semi-barbarity of her inhabitants are a cutting rebuke to that pride and self-exaltation, and contempt of others, which have made her, intellectually and morally, what she is. The walls of prejudice have been as massive and as difficult to be broken down, as the walls of brick and stone which, on one side, have constituted at once the boundary and the defence of the empire. Well may it be said of this haughty people, "The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock; whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, who shall bring me down to the ground?"

All the truth which is to be learned by the human mind has not yet been learned. The arts and sciences have not yet reached perfection. All the discoveries and inventions of which man is capable, have not yet been made. A trackless and boundless ocean of truth still stretches out before you. Newton only reached the sands on its margin; but his spirit, still hovering around us, seems to beckon you onward. A dwarf upon the shoulders of a giant, may well hope to see farther than the giant himself. With such men as Newton for your companions, your counsellors and guides, fear not to launch upon its surface. Say not, with those who would deter Columbus from his enterprize, "There is no land yet undiscovered. A western continent, if it exist at all, exists only as a vagary of the imagination." Nay, rather, admitting what is unques-

tionably the fact, that the amount of truth now known is as a drop of the bucket compared with what is yet to be learned, press onward in the pursuit, determined to know more and more continually. Break off the shackles which prejudice imposes upon weak minds, and determine to range, free as thought, over the whole field of knowledge, inquiring at every step, "What is truth?" Be candid, be open to conviction. Admit new light, and suffer not an odious epithet, attached to any branch of truth or its votaries, to prevent a deliberate and fair investigation! Remembering that "to err is human," cling to no dogma, simply because you have once avowed it, when increased light has shown its absurdity, and enlargement of view has convinced you that it is wrong and illiberal still to maintain it. Better relinquish *one* absurdity which has been advanced without reflection, than to add to it a thousand, which may forever bar the light of truth from your soul. Better acknowledge, "for once, I am wrong," than fall into an hundred errors to support or conceal one. Alas! how many are blockaded in their course, and are unable for years to take a single step forward, because they are ashamed first to take one step backward, and recant a theory, or renounce an error, which has given a false coloring to all their views, and a wrong direction to all their efforts. It is indeed noble! it is magnanimous to acknowledge and correct a mistake. Be that nobleness yours, whenever truth demands it; frankly to confess your error, with the resolution deeply

fixed in your heart, to consecrate the remnant of your days to the defense of the very truth you once opposed, merely because you did not understand it.

A third suggestion, upon which, did the limits of this exercise allow, I should deem it important to dwell, is, that in pursuing truth you must restrain and guard against the undue influence of the passions. They give a false coloring to every object which is contemplated under their influence. A man will readily believe that is true which he greatly desires to be true, in order to gratify some darling passion. Perhaps truth has encountered no more powerful and determined foe, in its progress through past ages, than it has met in the human passions.

Another suggestion somewhat allied to this, a regard to which is very important if you would arrive at truth is, avoid precipitancy of judgment. In relation to all questions involving great principles, be cautious how you become hastily committed in your opinions.

We have already spoken of the difficulty which most experience in retracing or recanting error. Pride, and a natural sense of shame, operates to prevent this. In proportion, therefore, to the difficulty of abandoning, should be the caution against adopting erroneous opinions. It has been well observed, "There are but few, who do not consider suspension of judgment as a weakness, although it is one of the noblest efforts of genius and capacity." To say in relation to a question of moment propos-

ed for our consideration, I dare not venture an opinion ; it requires more research than I have been able to give it ; years of study are necessary thoroughly to understand it, is deemed by many evidence of want of acuteness of perception, or maturity of intellect. Hence, to avoid this charge many leap at conclusions without evidence ; and leaping in the dark are quite as likely to leap into error as into truth. But even *truth* received without evidence, may be a continual source of error ; for so far as we are concerned, it is founded only on false principles ; and if a false principle induces us to receive truth *to-day*, the same principle may lead us to adopt error *to-morrow*. So that deciding without intelligence we are never safe. The true course to be pursued then, is, where reason does not clearly guide us, to withhold our assent ; for we should be always free to withhold consent from a subject, which we have not carefully and thoroughly examined.

These hints will, I trust, have prepared the way for one other, the last I shall offer on the present occasion.

With the mind thus guarded against the ingress of error, apply all its energies to the investigation of truth, with *undivided attention and unwearied perseverance*.

There is very little danger to be apprehended from the *over action* of the mental powers ; while there is very much to be dreaded from their *wrong action*. At least in our day we have no fear that the land will be taken and overrun by intellectual

giants. There may be now and then, isolated cases, where from over exertion, the intellectual powers have become soon exhausted, or temporarily unbalanced. But such instances are few and far between. The great difficulty is to get the mind excited; and when at work to give its energies the right direction. In these times of libel suits, I would not say aught which by possibility might be construed into a slander upon my country; or those who give impress to her intellectual character; but I am sure I expose myself to no such charge, when I venture the opinion, that we are not, so much as we ought to be, an intellectual people, i. e. there are not among us so many great minds as there ought to be; minds rendered great by intellectual culture; by vigorous, persevering, mental discipline. Nor among the mass of the people is that disposition honestly, cautiously, yet continually to inquire after truth, prevalent to the extent to which it ought to prevail. We are in no danger, therefore, of inflaming an immoderate zeal for knowledge when we say—*Pursue with still greater avidity, and give the undivided and undaunted energies of your minds to the investigation of truth.*

What object more worthy of pursuit? Riches? They may afford the means of temporary gratification of appetite and lust. But these are short lived; and riches themselves take wings and fly away. Sensual pleasures? They cloy, and in the end murder the soul! Honors? Their wreath is fading.

“What is honor but a name?
 A puff of empty breath;
 A flashing meteor’s fitful flame—
 Which soon is lost in death?”

No ! *Truth*—truth alone is substantial food for the soul ; and if the human mind may safely and wisely expend its energies upon any thing, it is *truth*. Permit me then, in a few observations, to urge the importance of attentive and persevering efforts of mind, if you would gain truth.

The human mind is so constituted that it cannot be intently occupied with two different objects at the same moment. It may pass from one to another, with the rapidity of thought ; and the habit of directing the mind to different objects, consecutively, with all its force, may be cultivated to a very great extent ; an extent of which only those who have formed the habit can have any just idea. Yet, limited in our capacities, as we are ; endowed only with a portion of genius ; we may make but very slow and uncertain progress, where the thoughts are constantly divided between different objects. Our own experience confirms this statement ; and thus, what we might infer from the nature of mind, is proved true by our own consciousness. Who has not met with difficulties, when he would direct his whole attention to some given subject ? Who has not encountered dissipation of mind ? found his thoughts wandering and distracted, even after much effort to fasten them ? The senses constitute the avenues through which we gain a knowledge of external objects. These are ever open ; and so near

are we to the objects of sense, that they continually obtrude themselves upon us, and are liable to thrust out those of intellectual perception, which are with more difficulty recalled. To gain a correct acquaintance with truth, therefore, when it is brought before the mind, we must seize it as with giant grasp, and hold it there till we can collect and concentrate our thoughts upon it. This is *attention*, which, while the mind would wander from object to object, and touch upon the thousands scattered over the whole field of mental research, binds and fixes it to *one*. But constituted as we are, occupying a position where obstacles to the cultivation of this habit are multiplied, we cannot hope to attain it without much labor and continued effort. We must not be easily discouraged, but persevere in the work. If one trial fails, we must make another, and still another. No habit, be it good or bad, was ever formed in a moment. It has gained its strength by repeated and unwearied exercise. The course, which at first was obstructed, has gradually opened; impediment after impediment has been removed; and now the full tide of habit flows, with almost resistless force. *Perseverance* has accomplished the work. What has it not accomplished? It

“ Is a Roman virtue,
That wins each godlike act—and plucks success,
E’en from the spear-proof crest of rugged danger.
And he who labors firm, and gains his point,
Be what it will, which crowns him with success,
He is the son of fortune and of fame.”

Having acquired the habit of attention, persevere in applying it to the investigation of truth. Many,

doubtless, have been just on the point of making discoveries, which have been made by those who succeeded them. They almost triumphed over the obstacles in their way; but wearied and disheartened, they abandoned the pursuit, when within a single step of the realization of their fondest hopes. Such need to be reminded of the words of the poet—

“Revolt is recreant, when pursuit is brave;
Never to faint, doth purchase what we crave.
Attempt the end—and never stand to doubt!
Nothing’s so hard, but search will find it out.”

Yes! young gentlemen, the mine in which truth is to be found may be deep and difficult to be worked; but the ore which it yields will more than compensate the labor expended to obtain it. It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire. It is above rubies. The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it; neither can it be valued with pure gold. What, *then*, if it cost effort—long continued, laborious effort, to obtain it?

“*No good, of worth sublime, will heaven permit
To light on man, as from the passing air.
The lamp of genius—though by nature lit,
If not protected, pruned and fed with care,
Soon dies—or runs to waste, with fitful glare.
Has immortality of name been given
To them that idly worship hills and groves,
And burn sweet incense to the queen of heaven?
Did Newton learn from fancy, as it roves,
To measure worlds, and follow where each moves?
Did Howard gain renown that shall not cease,
By wanderings wild, that nature’s pilgrim loves?
Or did Paul gain heaven’s glory and its peace,
By musing o’er the bright and tranquil isles of Greece?”*

To attain an object so noble—to accomplish a result fraught with so much happiness to one's self, and so much good to others—*who* would not be willing to sacrifice his love of ease, to rise up early and sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness? Who would not tax his energies of mind to their utmost, when by so doing he would most effectually satisfy the desire for happiness in his own bosom, and at the same time send forth a stream of happyfying influence, to gladden other hearts around him?

I address some to-night, whose very occupation seems to forbid the hope that they can accomplish wonders, by way of intellectual improvement. I mean the mechanic. Busily employed in manual labor; obliged in a great measure to confine his thoughts to the piece of mechanism with which his hands are engaged; how can *he* expect to excel in mental culture? Where are his advantages for pursuing and acquiring truth? I admit that he has difficulties to encounter which some others do not experience; but they are not insurmountable. To remove them, a higher degree of effort, a more fixed attention, a more indomitable spirit of perseverance may be required. But it *can* be done. The avenues to science and mental improvement are not closed to him. No exclusive patent for knowledge has been given to the learned few. The price of truth is not such that *he* cannot obtain it. The multiplication of books and other issues from the press, the springing up of these associations for mutual improvement, and other influences of a kindred

nature, which characterize our day, afford facilities not hitherto enjoyed, so that all are without excuse; and may I not add, that all are beginning to feel that they are so much without excuse, as to put forth the appropriate efforts to secure for themselves a name and influence among educated minds? We have our “learned blacksmiths,” who with their daily labor, as their only means of support, have mastered, in a few short years, seventeen different languages; and as public lecturers in our largest cities stand forth, the wonder of an intelligent audience, entranced by their eloquence. The indifference and mental indolence of every mechanic is thus rebuked. He is fairly shamed out of his excuses, and compelled to commence intellectual employment. Should there be one here to night, who excuses himself from mental effort on the ground of his position as to manual labor, the voice of *Burritt*, more shrill than the sound of the hammer upon his anvil, breaking over the hills of Massachusetts, would echo in his ears the strains of one of New England’s sweetest bards—

“Wake thou that sleepest in enchanted bowers!
 Lest these lost years should haunt thee, on the night
 When death is waiting for thy numbered hours,
 To take their swift and everlasting flight.
 Wake, e’er the earth-born charm unnerves thee quite!
 And be thy thoughts to work divine addressed:
 Do something! do it soon! with all thy might!
 An angel’s wing would droop, if long at rest;
 And God himself, inactive, were no longer blest.”

Permit me, ere I close, young gentlemen, to remind you of what your own reflections must have

suggested to you, during the progress of these remarks. If truth in science is important—truth in religion is equally important. If it is proper to inquire “What is truth?” in relation to the present life, and the objects which move around us, and around which we move, in our present state of being; it is no less proper to institute the same inquiry in regard to the life to come; the relations we sustain beyond the grave, to other beings and to other worlds. This is the dictate of a rational philosophy. Plato and Aristotle agitated the question “If a man die shall he live again?” Yet they were heathen, not Christian philosophers. Others have followed in their train, who have panted after future existence, and believed in its reality. “I have always believed” says the author of letters attributed to Ganganelli, “that the honor of possessing an immortal soul was the greatest possible glory.” It is a question well worth the highest consideration of all—Do I possess an immortal nature? A truly noble mind, solicitous to obtain truth on all subjects, would delight to inquire in regard to the reality and nature of future existence; the relations sustained to other and higher intelligences; and the best mode of preparing for their companionship. Truth on this subject would be hailed by such a mind, with gladness. Light coming from any source, would be welcomed with joy and gratitude. Need I say that such light beams from the pages of that volume called appropriately “*the Book*” because of the important truths it reveals? Every real disci-

ple of truth will love to drink from this fountain, where God and angels drink. The cultivation of the intellect is a noble work ; but the cultivation of the intellect and the *heart* too, is a work far more noble. It is drawing out the different elements of being in their due proportion. It is fitting alike for more extended usefulness and increased happiness. And who would not be useful as well as happy? Who would not by deeds of benevolence, aiming to enlighten, to elevate, to adorn and save his race ; leave behind him a monument in the affections of coming generations, more enduring than marble or brass ?

“ ’Tis infamy to die and not be missed !
 Or let all soon forget that thou didst e’er exist !
 Rouse to some work of high and holy love,
 And thou an angel’s happiness shalt know—
 Shalt bless the earth, while in the world above,
 The good begun by thee shall onward flow,
 In many a branching stream—and wider grow.
 The seed that in these few and fleeting hours
 Thy hands unsparing and unwearied sow,
 Shall deck thy grave with amaranthine flowers
 And yield thee fruits divine, in heaven’s immortal bowers !”

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